

Hawaii Becomes First State To Raise Smoking Age To 21

America's healthiest state implements new law with fines for retailers and underage consumers.

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Hawaii will ring in the new year by becoming the first state in the nation to raise the legal smoking age from 18 to 21.

In June, [Gov. David Ige](#) (D) signed the law aiming to prevent adolescents from smoking, buying and possessing both traditional and electronic cigarettes. It goes into effect on Friday.

“[We are proud to once again be at the forefront](#) of the nation in tobacco prevention and control,” Virginia Pressler, the state's director of health, said in a statement.

And it's a move befitting of a state that consistently finds itself [ranked among the healthiest in America](#).



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Retailer Holy Smokes has signs posted around its entryway to alert customers to Hawaii's new smoking laws.

[Ninety-five percent of adult smokers](#) in the U.S. begin smoking before the age of 21, according to the Hawaii

Department of Health. And while smoking rates have drastically decreased among Hawaii's youth and adults, there has been a "recent and rapid increase in e-cigarette use." Only 5 percent of Hawaii public high school students reported in 2011 that they had tried e-cigarettes, compared to 22 percent in 2014 -- a 344 percent increase.

Under the new law, stores caught selling cigarettes, e-cigarettes or other tobacco products to anyone under 21 [can be fined between \\$500 and \\$2,000](#). Additionally, any minor caught purchasing or possessing such products will face fines between \$10 and \$50, as well as community service.

There will be a [three-month educational grace period](#) to allow people to get used to the new laws. Warnings, rather than fines, will be issued during this time.

The [U.S. Army](#), the [Department of the Navy](#) and the [Marine Corps](#) have each announced their support of Hawaii's new law. Some have criticized the military for this, [arguing](#) that a person old enough to die for their country should be able to decide for themselves whether to smoke.

Bill Doughty, spokesman for the Navy Region Hawaii, told The Associated Press the Navy sees it as a fitness and readiness issue.

"When we can [prevent sailors from smoking or using tobacco](#), if we can get them to quit, then that improves their fitness and readiness, and it saves them a ton of money too," he said.



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A second measure, which also goes into effect Jan. 1, [incorporates e-cigarettes into Hawaii's smoke-free laws](#), meaning such products will be prohibited in areas smoking and tobacco use is already banned.

Lola Irvin, administrator for the state's Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion Division, said the measures make tobacco products less accessible and less attractive to Hawaii's youth.

"Prevention is the best strategy, and youth are especially vulnerable to nicotine addiction," she said in a statement. "By prohibiting their use in public places, the new laws encourage a no-smoking norm."

While Hawaii is the first state to raise the smoking age to 21, [more than 100 cities](#) have already done so, including New York City and Boston.